



# County Corner

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## Flathead County Solid Waste District

The Flathead County Solid Waste District is responsible for the planning and operation of the Flathead County Solid Waste System. The mission of the District is to provide environmentally sound and cost effective refuse collection, disposal and recycling opportunities for Flathead County residents and businesses. Our facilities are a major part of the economic and environmental infrastructure of Flathead County. Long range planning and fiscal integrity ensures decades of capacity without financial burdens in the future.

The District was formed in 1969 and operations started at the current landfill site in 1971. Many long-time residents of the valley remember when the landfill wasn't visible from Highway 93. When the facility started, 50 foot deep trenches were excavated and the refuse placed below ground surface. Currently, the



**Compacting at the Flathead County Landfill**

### Flathead County Solid Waste District **DAVID PRUNTY, Director**



Dave received a B.S. in Civil Engineering from Montana State University in 1992. He worked in Bozeman after receiving his degree for a solid waste consulting firm specializing in solid waste operations for three years. He then worked for seven years for a large scale, full-service solid waste firm in California and eastern Washington. Dave has been with the District since August, 2002. He is a certified landfill and compost facility manager through the Solid Waste Association of North America and the Washington State Organics Recycling Council.

facility is at an elevation of 3,210 feet and is quite visible when driving northbound on Highway 93. The current landfill area's highest elevation when completed will be approximately 20 feet higher than what can currently be seen from the highway.

The District is governed by a county commission appointed board of seven individuals. Each of the incorporated cities of Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls has a representative. The City/County Health Department and the county commission have one representative each and there are two members at-large. The Board of Directors is responsible for the operations and policies of the District. The District employs 23 personnel who operate the landfill and 12 container sites 363 days per year. Only Christmas and Thanksgiving are days when the landfill or the container sites aren't open for business.

Solid waste operations have changed dramatically over the years since the start of the current landfill. New rules were adopted by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and also by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality in the early 1990's. Since then, when the landfill moved to a new area where refuse had never been placed, a high tech lining system needed to be installed before solid waste could be dumped. These liners prevent leachate (water that percolates through the waste prism and picks up contaminants) from reaching groundwater under the facility. These state-of-the-art liners provide the highest protection for our groundwater resource. However, that protection comes with a high price tag. Currently, the landfill has

completed 16 acres of liner for solid waste operations. On the average, this liner has cost \$317,000 per acre to install.

Everyone is aware of the tremendous growth that the Flathead has experienced in recent years. The Solid Waste District is a direct indicator for activity in the Flathead. The increase in tonnage just in the last year was 7.5% from the previous year. Over 127,000 tons (254,000,000 pounds) of solid waste were deposited in the landfill in 2006. To plan for the future, the District has received approval from the DEQ for property just south of the current landfill for disposal operations for future generations. The county has landfill space for the next 30 to 60 years, depending on the growth of the population. If we continue on the 8% annual tonnage increase, the facility will be full by 2037. A more typically slow paced growth of 2% annually allows the facility to remain open to 2067. We most likely will fall somewhere in-between. And the District's Board of Directors is already looking to the future. This year a consultant will start to analyze the solid waste options for the future. Should we expand the current landfill site, find a new landfill site in the county, haul the County's refuse to an out-of-county or out-of-state landfill, drastically increase recycling efforts, or construct an incinerator and burn it? These are the questions to be address for future generations and the Flathead County Solid Waste District will be looking to the future to ensure the county's residents and businesses of environmentally sound and fiscally responsible solid waste disposal.

***"The needs of the future take precedence over the demands of the present."***

— County Commissioners: Joe Brenneman, Gary Hall and Dale Lauman